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A
LETTER

ADDRESSED TO

The Inhabitants of Warwick,

IN

ANSWER TO SEVERAL CHARGES OF A VERY
EXTRAORDINARY KIND,

ADVANCED AGAINST

THE DISSENTERS

Assembling at the Chapel, in High-street;

By the Rev. Mr. Miller, Vicar of St. Nicholas.

BY WILLIAM FIELD,
MINISTER OF THE CHAPEL.

DISCITE JUSTITIAM, MONITI—

Birmingham,

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. THOMPSON;

SOLD ALSO BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.

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THE PREFACE.
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THE following Letter, relating to an affair of a local nature, will probably fall into the hands of few persons who are not well acquainted with the occasion and design of it.

To the public at large, it would certainly prove a curious piece of information, that a clergyman may be found, in this land of liberty, who, with something like threats of violence indeed, but without any shew of reason or pretence of right, has dared to require a religious society, with whom he has no connexion, to dismiss a number of poor children willing to come to them for instruction. Of such temerity and folly (to call it by no worse name)

name) has the Vicar of St. Nicholas, in the borough of Warwick shewn himself capable.

*The clergy are perfectly right in endeavouring to support the credit of their schools. But they should certainly find some other way of doing it, than by overturning the schools of their Dissenting neighbours. If they would be instructed by me (*fas est ab hoste doceri*) they would take care to give great attention to the internal regulation of their own schools, without interfering in those of others; and to oppose, not power to right, but zeal and activity to zeal and activity.*

A LETTER, &c.



My Townsmen and Neighbours,

MOST of you have heard the very serious charges, publicly advanced against the Dissenters of this town, relating to the conduct of their Sunday school, which, coming from one of your clergymen, Mr. Miller, you will certainly think entitled to some credit. The persons concerned, as you may easily suppose, cannot prevail upon themselves to sit down silently and contentedly under charges of such a nature; especially as they have hitherto been considered as reputable men, and therefore have a *character*, a thing dear to all men, to lose. They have been so happy as to obtain the good opinion

of their townsmen and neighbours ; they are not conscious that they have done any thing to forfeit it ; and they naturally wish, if possible, to keep possession of it. You have heard the charges brought against them ; and you will not refuse them the common justice of hearing what they have to say in vindication of themselves.

As Mr. Miller has not thought proper to print his charges, or to exhibit them fairly in writing, though he has taken every other method of making them known to the public, I shall state them to you distinctly, and offer a reply to each of them in order.

Mr. Miller charges the Dissenters, in the first place, with taking an *unfair advantage* in the first institution of their Sunday school. This refers to a circumstance which some of you, perhaps, may not immediately recollect. In the Sunday schools belonging to the Church, it was made a rule, that the children of parishioners only, should be admitted. The Dissenters,

senters, observing that there were many poor children, living in the town and neighbourhood, who did not come under this description, thought proper to open a school for their benefit. What *unfair* advantage they have taken, or meant to take, in this, I am at loss to discover.— They found children in the streets, who wanted instruction, and they resolved to provide them with the means of instruction. This is what the Dissenters have done, and what Mr. Miller is pleased to condemn; but what, I am much mistaken, if you do not think worthy of praise.

But the most serious part of the charge seems to be, that the Dissenters instituted their school, not for the purpose of giving young children instruction in reading and writing, and in the first principles of religion, but with the view of *making them Dissenters*. These people, says Mr. Miller, are not those honest disinterested men, who do good purely for the sake of doing good. They have other sinister ends in
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view. They wish to train up children to be enemies to the Church established by law.

You need not to be informed that the Dissenters do certainly hold sentiments, in which, as Churchmen, you cannot agree. They strongly object to the interference of the civil magistrate in matters of religion, and maintain the right of private judgment and liberty of conscience, in its fullest extent. But though these principles distinguish them, *as Dissenters*, yet there are other principles, and those of still higher importance, in which they are happy to agree with you, and with Christians of all denominations. Particularly, the Dissenters are fully agreed with you, that the true dignity and happiness of man is founded in knowledge, and consists in the practice of piety and virtue. They join with you, in deploring the ignorance and vice which prevail amongst the lower orders of men; and wish, with you, to provide against this great and growing evil. In opening a Sunday school, they have the same great object in
view

view with yourselves. They wish to furnish the poor with the means of instruction. If any of you would take the trouble to examine the children of their school, you will probably find that most of them can read, and some of them can write. If you should ask them, Who made them, and what they were made for? and other great questions in the principles of religion, they will probably be able to give a pertinent answer. But as for any thing like sentiments unfriendly to the established Church, you will certainly enquire among them in vain. Even many of the books put into their hands, are the production of pious and sensible members of the Church. The Dissenters would, by no means, be understood to be indifferent to their principles *as Dissenters*; but of these they are, at all times, ready to lose sight, in the greater and more important principles, which belong to them in common with all other Christians.

But if Mr. Miller is to be credited in this matter, and not the Dissenters themselves ;

selves ; if their great object be, to teach the children of their school, the principles peculiar to themselves, as Mr. Miller, will have it ; even then, you must be sensible, they would be doing nothing more than what every other man would be justified in doing. If this were truly the state of the case, let the clergy only oppose them by means strictly fair and and honourable, and they would have no right to complain.

But Mr. Miller charges the Dissenters, not only with taking an unfair advantage in the first institution of their school, but also with using *unjust means* in supporting it. The children, says he, are offered bribes to come to their school, in preference to that of the church, They are told of “ money ” that will be given them ; of “ cloathing ” that will be offered them ; of “ dinners ” that will be, sometimes, provided for them. These are the little arts, says Mr. Miller, by which the Dissenters contrive to support the credit of their school.

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This is Mr. Miller's *second charge*, and, you will soon see, it is as ill-founded as the first. It is a notorious fact, and of the truth of which any person may easily satisfy himself, that most of the children belonging to the Dissenting school, were actually *dismissed* from that of the Church; some few excepted, who come from the neighbouring villages. With what colour of truth, then, can Mr. Miller say of these children, that they were seduced, "by bribery and corruption," from the Church Sunday school, when the fact is, they were dismissed by the *managers themselves*?

Indeed, the Dissenters have never had occasion to use bribery as Mr. Miller pretends. It is well known, that many more children have applied for admittance than could possibly be received. The list of candidates for admission, which it has been usual to keep, has seldom been without a considerable number of names. In short, I will venture to say, that the Dissenters may safely give the challenge to
Mr. Miller,

Mr. Miller, or to any other person, to produce a *single instance* of a child, admitted into their school, who did not come without any previous sollicitation whatever.

It is very true, that, *after their admission*, every mark of favour is shewn to those children who conduct themselves to the satisfaction of the teachers and visitors. Tickets of small value, according to a plan proposed by Mr. Raikes himself, are given to encourage early and regular attendance, and to excite a spirit of emulation, which may at any time be converted into money. But this is a different thing from *bribery*, though it is the only thing that Mr. Miller could lay hold of to give colour to his charge. And is not the same plan adopted in all well regulated schools, not only among Protestant Dissenters, but also among the Members of the Church of England? It is also very true, as Mr. Miller says, that articles of cloathing are sometimes given to the children; though it is generally
done

done in a way that promotes a spirit of industry among them, the children being obliged to defray part of the expence. But is not the same thing done in the Church schools? and in many other Sunday schools? And did ever any body, before Mr. Miller, think of passing a censure upon it, as if it came under the description of *unfair* and *dishonourable* means of supporting a school.

But the most serious part of the charge, I understand to be, that the children belonging to their school, are sometimes invited by Dissenters, charitably disposed, to partake of a *dinner*. To this charge also I believe we must plead guilty. I find too, from a Letter now before me, that the excellent Mr. Raikes is annually guilty of the same great crime of giving "roast beef and plumb-pudding," as he honestly confesses, to the children of his parish, assembled in a large room proper for the purpose! But what *motive*, would you think, the crafty Dissenter has in providing one hearty meal in the week
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for a number of poor hungry children? Mr. Miller tells you, that it is “to make “Dissenters.” A hard case truly, to which the unfortunate Dissenter is reduced! He can neither cloath the naked, nor feed the hungry, nor instruct the ignorant, without being suspected of the wicked design of *making Dissenters*.

But the Dissenters, whose zeal Mr. Miller will perhaps allow might do honour to a better cause, are not contented with *bribing* children to receive instruction, most of whom had been dismissed by other instructors; they are also charged with seducing the *parents* of these children from the communion of the Church established by law; and persuading them to unite, in worshipping the great Father of all, with Protestant Dissenters.

This is Mr. Miller's *third charge* against the Dissenters. It refers to a plan first proposed by Mrs. Trimmer; a lady who does honour to the Church of which she is a member; whose name, as a friend
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to the poor and the friendless, I can never pronounce without the highest respect. The great object of this plan, which deserves at least to be better understood, is not to raise one religious society at the expence of another, as Mr. Miller seems to think ; but to increase and enlarge every religious society, without taking from any. It is to bring to a place of worship, those, among the lower ranks of society, who are accustomed to attend no place of public worship at all ; to put in the way of sharing the benefits of the Christian sabbath, those who now, carelessly and thoughtlessly perhaps, deprive themselves of them.

Accordingly, the Protestant Dissenters never formed the most distant idea of attempting to influence any regular and conscientious members of the Church of England. Let Mr. Miller mark what I say, and dispute it if he can. The views of the Dissenters were directed quite another way. It was to a very different class of men that they looked ; to those,
who

who lived in the profession, neither of the religion of the Church, nor of any other religion; who, for want of being better taught, were used to spend the day, set apart for the most excellent and useful purposes, in a manner which no Christian can mention without serious disapprobation. To this description of persons the Dissenters went: And what did they do? They put remonstrances into their hands, pointing out the duty of attending public worship; and then informed them, that the collections usually made for the use of the poor, would be distributed among those only who should give a regular attendance at the public services of religion, and that for the purpose of cloathing their children. This is a simple statement of the whole plan. And by its own merits let it stand or fall.

There is another affair which seems to have given great offence to Mr. Miller, and which may be considered in the light of his *fourth charge* against the Dissenters. It appears, that the place of clerk in the
Dissenting

Dissenting Chapel, had been offered to a person who, for some time before, had been regularly present at that place of worship, who it was not known had ever attended any other; but who, it seems, had been baptized in the days of his early infancy, by a clergyman of the Church; which, in Mr. Miller's ideas, makes a complete Churchman. This simple offer, made in these circumstances, Mr. Miller is pleased to call by the hard names of bribery and corruption; with what propriety of speech do you determine. I suppose, if the place had been offered to Mr. Miller himself, provided he had been left at perfect liberty to decline it (which was precisely the case) he would have had no great room to complain.

I have now finished what I wished to say, in reply to Mr. Miller's charges. In the concluding part of this Letter, I feel myself obliged to state to you the particulars of Mr. Miller's conduct in the whole of this shameful business;—in which I will confess to you, I can discover

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neither the wisdom of an enlightened philosopher, nor the consistency of a plain honest man, nor the liberality of a gentleman, nor the benevolence of a Christian. Whether this be too severe a censure, do you judge, after you have read the following statement of facts,—for the truth of which the Dissenters are ready to answer.

I begin the account with a *friendly visit* made to Mr. Miller, by some of the Dissenters. The conversation turned upon Sunday schools. Encouraged by the frank and open behaviour of Mr. Miller, the Dissenters laid before him an account of the management of their Sunday school, and of its present flourishing state. Mr. Miller listened with attention, as he well remembers, and expressed greater satisfaction than, I fear, he felt in his heart. Can you believe it? This man of candour is the man who, within a few days after, set himself to oppose and ruin the institution to which he had just given so much praise; and violently forced from the
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the school, children who came to it with pleasure, and left it with tears !

Soon after this, a conference took place ; managed by three clergymen on the part of the Church of England, and three persons on the part of the Dissenters. The charges, mentioned in the foregoing pages, were fully stated and fairly answered. And the three Dissenters, of which I am one, who were present on the occasion, do solemnly aver, that the clergymen (and especially Mr. Miller) *expressly declared* that the whole affair was cleared up to their entire satisfaction ; and passed compliments on the zeal, activity, and charity of the Dissenters, greater than, it was thought, the zeal, activity, and charity of the Dissenters deserved. Mr. Miller went away. The rest *you* know. You know that he publicly exhibited and strenuously laboured to support *those very charges*, which he before declared had been answered to his entire satisfaction. This is a tale, at which poor simple *Honesty* blushes !

Soon after this, Mr. Miller gave the Dissenters to understand, that he was come to the resolution of using all "*fair* and "*honourable*" means, to induce the children belonging to their school to leave it. But what, in Mr. Miller's ideas, are fair and honourable means? Let his conduct explain them. One person he threatens to deprive of the *bread*, another of the *coals*, provided at the public expence, unless their children were withdrawn from the Dissenting school.

But there is one affair upon which I cannot animadvert with too much severity. One person whose child belongs to this school, and whose *name* Mr. Miller very well knows, was *kindly* reminded by him, that it was in the power of the steward of a certain noble Lord to "deprive him of his work". This is a reflection upon the character of this great personage, which I am satisfied he does not deserve. Will any man in the least acquainted with his Lordship, venture to say, that he can possibly descend to the meanness of depriving a poor
man

man of his bread, only because he chuses to worship God in a Dissenting Meeting-house, or to send his child to be taught reading and writing by a Dissenter?

I now come to a part of Mr. Miller's conduct, which I am sure every person whether Churchman or Dissenter, in whose heart I desire any share, will join with me to condemn: I mean the ungenerous advantage he attempted to take of the late unfortunate disturbances at *Birmingham*. It is well known, especially to Mr. Miller himself, that many of the Dissenters in this Town are nearly related to, or intimately connected with, some of the principal Dissenters in *Birmingham*. This time of general alarm and distress, Mr. Miller seems to have thought the time proper for his purpose. Their places of worship, he knew, were destroyed; the houses of their friends, he knew, were in flames; their friends themselves flying for their lives. Let us now call for these Dissenters, say he, and require them, on pain of our displeasure,

to bend to our will. Let us tell them, that their obstinacy may bring down upon themselves "some dreadful consequences;" that they have "a Meeting-house and dwellings of their own, that may possibly in their turn be destroyed." They are in deep distress I perceive, but let us take our advantage of it, though it may chance to add to their affliction. This is hard-hearted cruelty indeed,—for, in justice to my feelings, I can call it by no better name.

And is tender pity, my townsmen and neighbours, to be denied to the sufferings of *Dissenters*, who are men of like passions with yourselves, only because they think it right to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences? Are the common feelings of humanity to be suppressed, when a *Dissenter* is the object? I am sure you cannot think so. And by the friendly conduct, especially of some of you, which you have hitherto observed towards the Dissenters, you have raised in their minds, a monument of praise
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to yourselves, and of honour to your Church.

But I must return to my story. By a message from Mr. Miller, *two* persons, on the part of the Protestant Dissenters, were appointed to meet *six times* that number, on the part of the Church of England. I make no remarks upon this; every body must see, that it was quite contrary to all the rules of common justice and common civility. From these gentlemen a verbal message was brought, which did not appear to the Dissenters to be very clear and explicit. But not easily conceiving, that the members of the Church could seriously require them to shut the doors of their schools (a thing which they must be sensible they have no manner of right to do) the Dissenters charitably supposed, that nothing more would be expected from them than to permit all children, who were willing, quietly to depart. Accordingly, a paper was presented to the gentlemen assembled at the court-house. This paper will be

found at the end of this Letter, and shall be left to speak for itself.

To this paper, a verbal answer was returned, which made it necessary to send a second letter, which I was desired to address to Mr. Bird, the Mayor of the Town, and which, together with the answer to it, will also be found at the end of this Letter. To these papers, I have also subjoined a *hand-bill* just published, and of which the public will certainly form its own opinion. What may be the consequences of the *alarm* excited, as Mr. Miller says, by a harmless Sunday school, is best known to Mr. Miller himself.

I shall not be at all surprized, if the *next* hand-bill *alarms* the whole Town, with an account that the Sunday school children, some of whom can just lift a straw, are actually marching, in close array, armed with primers and spelling-books, to pull down the church and steeple to the ground! Before I take my
leave

leave of Mr. Miller, I will just give him one piece of intelligence, of which he may make his own use, that he hath to deal with *obstinate* men, who are not easily to be *alarmed* out of their just rights and privileges.

My townsmen and neighbours, I have now laid before you, what I think, a fair statement of the whole affair, which has been so much of late the subject of conversation. You will form your own judgment upon it. And all that myself and my friends have to wish is, that you may now follow your own judgment, and not suffer yourselves to be any longer *misled* by a man who, if his object be *good*, has certainly shewn himself capable of using the most *unjustifiable means*, in order to attain it.

I am,

My Townsmen and Neighbours,

Your very humble Servant,

Warwick,
Aug. 8, 1791.

WILLIAM FIELD.

A Paper, presented to the Gentlemen assembled at the Court-House, in Warwick, on Wednesday, July 27, to confer upon the propriety of permitting the Protestant Dissenters to support a Sunday School.

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THE Protestant Dissenters, assembling at the High-street Chapel, cannot, without great concern, observe the harmony interrupted, which has so long and so happily subsisted between the members of the Church of England and themselves. And they cannot forbear to express their ardent hopes and wishes, that mutual good understanding, may, by mutual forbearance and candour be again restored.

The Protestant Dissenters beg leave to assure the members of the Church of England, that in instituting a Sunday School it was their sole intention to provide the means of instruction for those poor children, who could not enjoy the benefit of the Church Sunday school; and that their great object has uniformly been, not to inspire the minds of these children with sentiments unfriendly to the Church of England, but to teach them the great principles of religion and good morals common to Churchmen and Dissenters, and to Christians of all denominations.

The Protestant Dissenters further beg leave to say, with regard to the parents of the children belonging to their school, that in endeavouring to persuade them to attend

attend their place of worship, they have taken particular care to influence none whom they knew to be *regular* and *conscientious* members of the Church of England; but *those only*, who had been accustomed to spend the sabbath in a manner, which every good Christian, as well as themselves, must seriously disapprove. They are persuaded the members of the Church of England will agree with them, that it is better to attend any place of religious worship, than none at all. And if these poor people can be brought to attend the service of the Church of England, the great object of the Protestant Dissenters will be answered.

In reply to the remonstrance lately made to them, by the members of the Church of England; the Protestant Dissenters are ready to give them the *fullest assurances*, that the children of their school have perfect liberty to leave it, whenever it is the choice of their parents; and that their Sunday school is open to none but to those, whose parents, freely and deliberately, *prefer it*, to any other.

This plain and simple statement of their views and motives in instituting and supporting a Sunday school, the Protestant Dissenters beg leave to submit to the consideration of the members of the Church of England, They have only to add, that they are willing to make every sacrifice to the desires and wishes of the clergymen, gentlemen, and inhabitants of the town, consistent with the principles of their religion, and the peace and safety of their consciences.

Warwick, July 24, 1791.

A Letter to John Bird, Esq.

SIR,

I AM desired in the name of the Protestant Dissenters, assembling at the High-street, Chapel, to convey to you the result of their deliberations, respecting their Sunday school; and to beg you will take the trouble to communicate it, to the rest of the members of the Church of England.

From the moderation which has so long distinguished the members of the Church of England, the Protestant Dissenters had been led to conceive great hopes that the paper presented to the gentlemen assembled at the Court-house, would have proved satisfactory. And as they still think the proposal therein made to be fair and equitable, they are encouraged to renew it. I am therefore directed to say, that the Protestant Dissenters are ready to give to the members of the Church of England, the *fullest assurances*, that their school shall be open to those children only, whose parents freely and deliberately prefer it, to any other.

If this proposal should be thought worthy of any attention by the clergymen and gentlemen of the town, I am instructed farther to propose, that two persons, on the part of the Church of England, and two persons on the part of the Protestant Dissenters, shall be appointed to make enquiries into the wishes of the parents of the children

children belonging to their school. On the one hand, the Protestant Dissenters will agree, that no children shall be permitted to continue in their school, whose parents do not *expressly desire* it. On the other hand, they hope the members of the Church of England will also agree, that those children whose parents may *chuse* it, shall be suffered to continue in the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the means of instruction, offered by the Protestant Dissenting Sunday school.

But if the members of the Church of England can still think it right to require, that the Sunday school belonging to the Protestant Dissenters shall be shut, even against those children who desire to continue in it; I am directed to say, in the most explicit manner, that the Protestant Dissenters cannot, possibly reconcile it to their feelings of duty to dismiss a *single child*, who is willing to come to them for instruction.

As the views of the Protestant Dissenters, in the conduct of their Sunday school have been much misunderstood, I am further instructed to say, that it is intended to publish an explanation of them, together with an answer to several charges brought against some of the Dissenters, which accordingly will soon be published.

I am,

S I R,

High-street,
August 2, 1791.

Your humble servant,

WILLIAM FIELD.

Mr. Bird's Answer.

SIR,

IN consequence of your letter of yesterday, I this morning called together those gentlemen of the established Church, who assembled at the Court-house, when the Mr. Parkes presented the paper you mention, respecting the Sunday school supported by the Protestant Dissenters; and by whom I am desired to say, that the proposals you now offer concerning the same are unsatisfactory.

I am,

SIR,

Your very obedient Servant,

JOHN BIRD.

Cotton End,
Aug. 3, 1791.

Copy

*Copy of the Hãnd-bill circulated on Thursday
August 4,*

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Warwick, August 4, 1791.

*THE Sunday School establiſhed by the
Dissenters, having given cause of alarm to the clergy
and several of the inhabitants of the Borough; the
attendance of all the inhabitants who are members
of the Church of England is requested at the Court-
house, on Wednesday next, at twelve o'clock, to confer
upon the subject.*

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THE END.



